

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
25 September 1966

ARMY and DOS review(s) completed.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Heavy fighting continues in northern Quang Tri Province where enemy casualties now total more than 700. The South Vietnamese military government will back La Thanh Nghe, former head of the Saigon city council, for president of the constituent assembly.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Significant contact with enemy forces over the weekend continues to be highlighted by Operation PRAIRIE, near the Demilitarized Zone (Paras. 1-4).

the VC plan to launch a massive land attack in the Da Nang area before the American elections (Paras. 8-9). Elements of the VC 5th Division may have been inactive recently as a result of personnel shortages (Para. 10).

II. Political Situation in South Vietnam: The military leadership apparently has picked its candidate for president of the constituent assembly (Paras. 1-2). Agreement in assembly that a new government will need a strong executive branch (Paras. 3-4). Chief of State Thieu expresses support of Article 20 and indicates that political situation within military leadership is stable (Paras. 4-5). Other views on problems and prospects of constituent assembly aired by prominent civilian political leader (Paras. 6-7). The struggle between Tam Chau and Tri Quang for control of Buddhist Institute continues (Paras. 8-9).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:

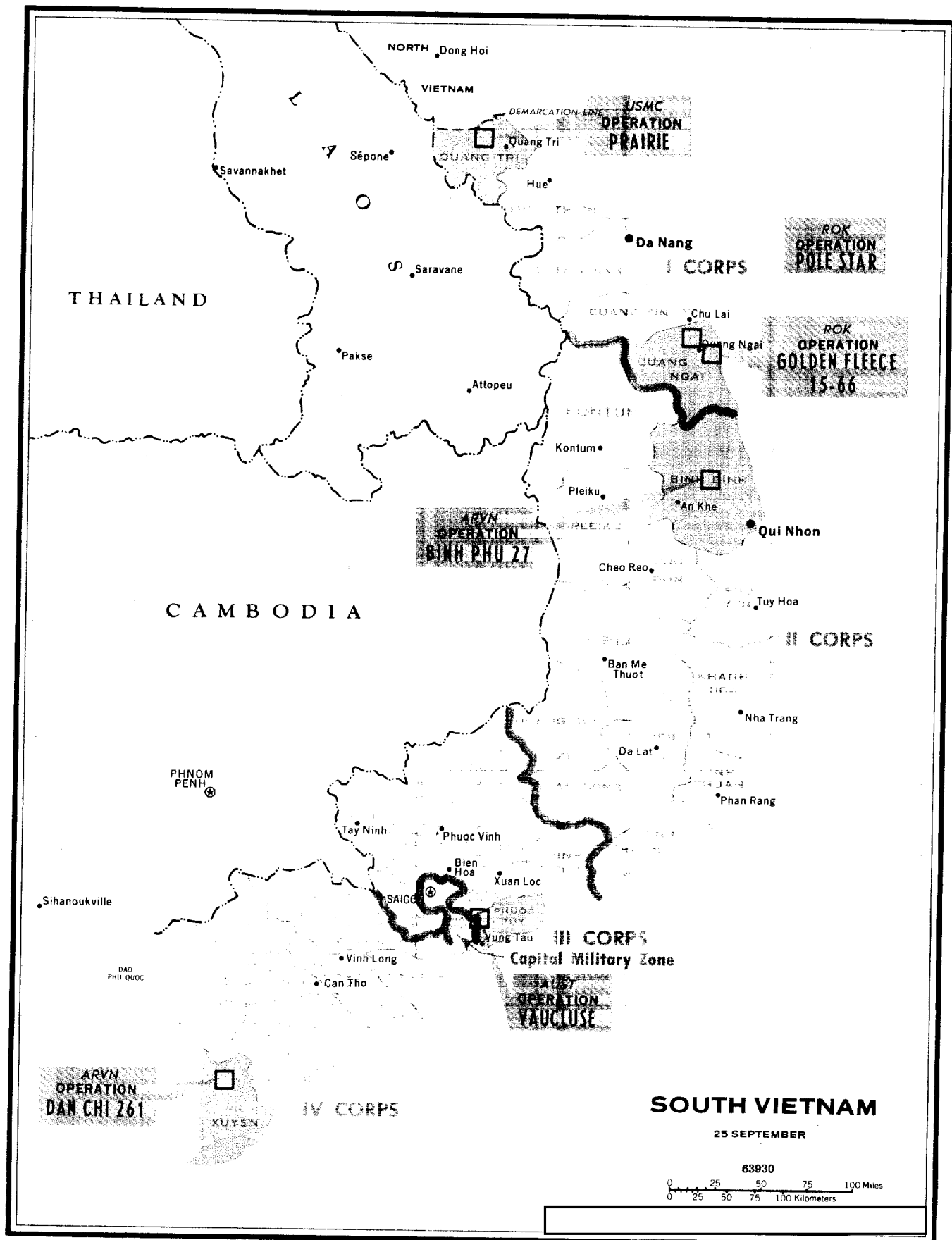
fighters are using a new tactic in an effort to force US strike aircraft to jettison their bomb loads (Para. 3).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi propaganda continued to denounce Ambassador Goldberg's UN speech this weekend (Paras. 1-3). Newly announced Soviet trade statistics show substantial increase in trade with North Vietnam during 1965 (Para. 4).

VI. Other Major Developments: A significant increase in truck movements through the Mu Gia Pass has been reported for the first time since the rainy season began last May (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Operation PRAIRIE, the five-battalion US Marine search-and-destroy operation under way since 3 August in northernmost Quang Tri Province, continued over the weekend with several significant contacts with North Vietnamese forces. The largest of these began on 24 September when two US Marine companies engaged an estimated VC/NVA battalion. After several hours of light and sporadic contact, the two forces became heavily engaged with the marines receiving heavy enemy fire. After about seven and a half hours the enemy broke contact and withdrew leaving behind 58 killed. US casualties were five killed and 43 wounded.

2. Cumulative totals for Operation PRAIRIE now stand at: US, 110 killed and 382 wounded; VC/NVA, 729 killed. Almost 1,400 tactical air sorties have been flown in support of this operation to date, along with a significant number of B-52 strikes.

3. In other significant activity over the weekend, South Vietnamese Army elements engaged an estimated enemy battalion on 23 September in an area 33 miles northwest of Qui Nhon. Elements of a US battalion from the 1st Cavalry Division established blocking positions to assist in this engagement. Casualty reports indicate one US advisor wounded, eight South Vietnamese killed, 38 wounded; the enemy suffered 132 killed. This activity took place during the conduct of Operation BINH PHU 27.

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Current as of 25/0400 EDT

SIGNIFICANT GROUND OPERATIONS

NAME	TYPE/DATE INITIATED	LOCATION	FORCES	CASUALTIES TO DATE				
				FRIENDLY KIA	WIA	VC/NVA KIA	CPTR	SUS
PRAIRIE	3 AUG SEARCH & DESTROY	QUANG TRI PROV	5 BNS USMC	110	382	722(BC)	3	2
MACON	SECURITY & PACI- FICATION 5 JUL	QUANG NAM PROV	1 BN USMC	22	160	432(BC)	7	45
GOLDEN FLEECE 15-66	S&D - RICE PROT 23 SEP	QUANG NGAI PROV	1 BN ROK MAR	3	6			1
GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1	S&D 16 SEP	QUANG NGAI PROV	1 BN USMC	1	17	156(BC)	3	23
THAYER	S&D - 12 SEP	BINH DINH PROV	6 BNS 1ST CAVDIV	23	195	123(BC)	45	544
DEUL KUK HWA	S&D - 22 SEP	BINH DINH PROV	4 BNS ROK CAVDIV	3	23	61(BC)	18	336
PAUL REVERE III	BORDER SURVEIL- LANCE 25 AUG	PLEIKU & DARLAC	4 BNS 25th INF DIV 1 BN 4th INF DIV	2	17	31(BC)	19	88
SEWARD	SEC - 4 SEP	PHU YEN & KHANH HOA PROVINCES	3 BNS 101st ABN DIV 1 BN 4th INF DIV	19	118	130(BC)	53	570
DECATUR	SEC - 2 SEP	BINH DINH PROV	1 BN 1st INF DIV					
BYRD	S&D - 25 AUG	BINH TUY, BINH THUAN & LAM DONG PROVINCES	1 BN 1st CAV DIV	2	6	87(BC)	9	106
SUNSET BEACH	S&D - 1 SEP	HAU NGHIA PROV	3 BNS 25th INF DIV	3	24	37(BC)	25	124
LANIKAI	S&D - 14 SEP	LONG AN PROV	1 BN 25th INF DIV					
BATON ROUGE	S&D - 3 SEP	BIEN HOA PROV	1 BN 1st INF DIV 1 ARVN ABN BN.	2	12	41(BC)	1	
KAMUELA	S&D - 19 SEP	BINH DUONG	1 BN 25th INF DIV			1(BC)	1	6

* S&D = SEARCH AND DESTROY

SEC = SECURITY

4. South Vietnamese forces also scored a significant victory in the Mekong Delta on 23 September. Several ARVN battalions participating in Operation DAN CHI 261 reported contacts with Viet Cong forces some 155 miles southwest of Saigon which resulted in 99 enemy killed including 45 killed by air attacks plus 54 VC soldiers captured. ARVN losses were two wounded.

Korean and Australian Operations

5. A new Korean battalion-size search-and-destroy/rice harvest protection operation, GOLDEN FLEECE 15-66, began on 24 September in an area about four miles east of Quang Ngai. This operation will be just to the north of a US Marine search-and-destroy/rice harvest protection Operation named GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1.

6. Operation POLE STAR, a route clearing operation along National Route 1 between Quang Ngai and Chu Lai, ended on 23 September. Three Korean battalions participated in this operation and the final casualties include three Koreans killed and 23 wounded. Five VC were killed and 44 suspects captured or detained.

7. Operation VAUCLUSE, a two-battalion Australian search-and-destroy operation in the area about 35 miles southeast of Saigon, also ended on 23 September. Seven VC were killed as against one Australian wounded in this operation.

VC Plan to Launch Attack Prior to November Election

8. Viet Cong forces, in an attempt to carry out some spectacular action prior to the American elections in November, are reportedly planning to launch a large-scale land attack in the coming months in the Da Nang area. Key installations targeted by the VC include the Da Nang Airfield and the Non Nuoc landing field near Marble Mountain. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] told a former VC member that the attack would not be a mere raid or an occasional shelling.

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9. Impending VC/NVA activity in I Corps has been expected for some time now but has probably been hampered by US spoiling operations. Nevertheless, the Communists may feel that some sort of a spectacular victory would help offset recent military and political setbacks, such as VC inability to prevent a relatively large South Vietnamese voter turnout for the 11 September election. Communist forces currently believed to be located in the vicinity of Da Nang include the 95 "B" and 3rd NVA regiments supported by a number of separate battalions and local force troops.

Inactivity of VC 5th Division

10. Several captured documents suggest that the recent inactivity of the regimental units of the VC 5th Division may be caused by a shortage of personnel. Many personnel of the 274th VC Regiment were suffering from malaria and the regiment was short some 1,500 mosquito nets, according to two documents, one of which was dated 16 July. The strength of this unit as of 1 July was 1,251, as opposed to an estimated order of battle strength of 2,000. Several other recent developments support the premise that the unit may be short of personnel. The second battalion of the 274th Regiment, for example, suffered heavy losses as a result of a B-52 strike on 22 August while another regiment of the 5th Division, the 275th, sustained over 240 killed in August.

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II. POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The military leadership has settled on La Thanh Nghe, former head of the Saigon city council, as its candidate for president of the constituent assembly. Nghe told a US official yesterday that he had been asked by Prime Minister Ky to run for the position, and was assured that he could count on the votes of all military deputies in the assembly.

2. Nghe's statements were confirmed by Foreign Minister Tran Van Do who told a US official that the military leaders have decided that Nghe is the strongest man available to block the candidacy of Tran Van Van, an outspoken critic of the military leadership. The US Embassy describes Nghe as a competent administrator who enjoys good relations with many members of the assembly as well as with the military.

Constituent Assembly

3. Meanwhile, in a Saigon press interview, Tran Van Van strongly endorsed a presidential system for the future South Vietnamese government. Van argued that a strong executive is absolutely essential in the current South Vietnamese political context for a stable and responsible government. Similar views were expressed by Chief of State Thieu, who told General Westmoreland this weekend that a strong executive branch is one feature of a new governmental system on which there is a general consensus among constituent assembly delegates. Thieu said that the assembly delegates are divided, however, on how the legislative branch will be organized and how much power it should be given.

4. Thieu also discussed Article 20 of the decree establishing the constituent assembly, which authorizes the Directorate to amend any constitution drafted by the assembly. Thieu stated that he hoped there would be no need to invoke the article, but argued that it is needed to meet any "emergency" which might arise. He implied that the military leadership will fight efforts to have the article abrogated by the assembly.

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5. Commenting on the state of political affairs within the military, Thieu told General Westmoreland that "everything is all right." Thieu stated that the military leaders are determined to remain united in the face of efforts by competing northern and southern politicians to garner their support. He also indicated that the disposition of certain corrupt members of the leadership will be held in abeyance in order not to "rock the boat" during this sensitive juncture.

6. Other views on the problems and prospects of the constituent assembly were aired recently by former deputy prime minister Tran Van Tuyen. Tuyen, a brilliant lawyer and long-standing political figure with personal ties to a wide range of civilian and military leaders, told a US official that he discounts the importance of the movement in the assembly against Article 20, and implied that he is lending his weight to avoid a confrontation with the government on this issue. Tuyen said that a deadlock was shaping up in the race for assembly president between Phan Khac Suu, Tran Van Van, and Phan Quang Dan, but that he is pushing for a compromise in which Suu will get the presidency and Dan the secretary general post.

7. Tuyen also claimed that he is working with several deputies and labor leaders in an effort to form a peasant-worker party. He said that thus far there is little evidence that the government is forming its own party in the assembly or is trying to work with the deputies in a coherent or organized manner.

Buddhists

8. The struggle between Tam Chau and Tri Quang for control of the Buddhist Institute is continuing. On 21 September, Tam Chau addressed a letter to the supreme patriarch announcing that he will not resign his position as chairman of the Buddhist Institute. The following day, Tri Quang issued a communiqué calling for an extraordinary meeting of the Buddhist association and several actions contradicting Tam Chau's move for a return to the national pagoda and a suspension of the struggle against the government.

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9. The Saigon press reports today that the Buddhist association will hold an extraordinary congress in the next four weeks in order to "clear up misunderstandings" and prepare for the election of a new Institute chairman "by the end of this year." The head of the Cambodian Theravada Buddhists told a US official today that the Cambodian group will support Tam Chau, and believes that if Chau can "organize sufficiently" he will have working majority in the congress.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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New MIG Tactic to Thwart US Strikes

3. North Vietnamese MIGs continue to display caution in encounters with US strike aircraft over the DRV, according to MACV. Rather than engage the US aircraft in prolonged combat, the MIGs have been attempting to feint at or merely make one pass at US strike formations in the hopes that the US aircraft will jettison their ordnance. With this tactic the MIGs have been able to thwart a number of bombing strikes at minimum risk.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi continued throughout the weekend to attack Ambassador Goldberg's UN speech on Vietnam. A variety of public functions--ranging from the celebration of an obscure anniversary of South Vietnamese "resistance" to the welcoming ceremonies of a visiting delegation headed by Czech Premier Lenart--were used as platforms to denounce the US position on negotiations. The propaganda commentary reflected a continuation of Hanoi's hard line by reaffirming Communist insistence that any political settlement must be based on the DRV's four points and the Liberation Front's five points. A special Fatherland Front communiqué pledged a continuation of the fighting for five, ten, or twenty years if necessary.

2. Although the propaganda response to Ambassador Goldberg's recommendations did not depart from known Communist positions, the speeches and articles did appear to be emphasizing the necessity for a cessation of the bombing and a recognition of the Liberation Front. In a welcoming speech for the Czech premier on 24 September, DRV Premier Pham Van Dong, for example, claimed that if the US really wanted to demonstrate their honest intention to seek a peaceful solution, they would recognize the four points and "show their good will by acts"--the unconditional cessation of the air attacks (and "all other war acts against the DRV") and a recognition of the Front as "their interlocutor to solve all questions on Vietnam." North Vietnam has suggested before that the US should offer some earnest of its intention to negotiate, and this time the premier appears to be emphasizing the issues of the air attacks and the Front, perhaps to encourage some movement in the US position on these issues.

3. A 24 September party daily editorial discussed the "key to the problem of ending the war," as including cessation of the bombings of the North, withdrawal of US troops from the South, and a "decisive say" for the Front in any settlement.

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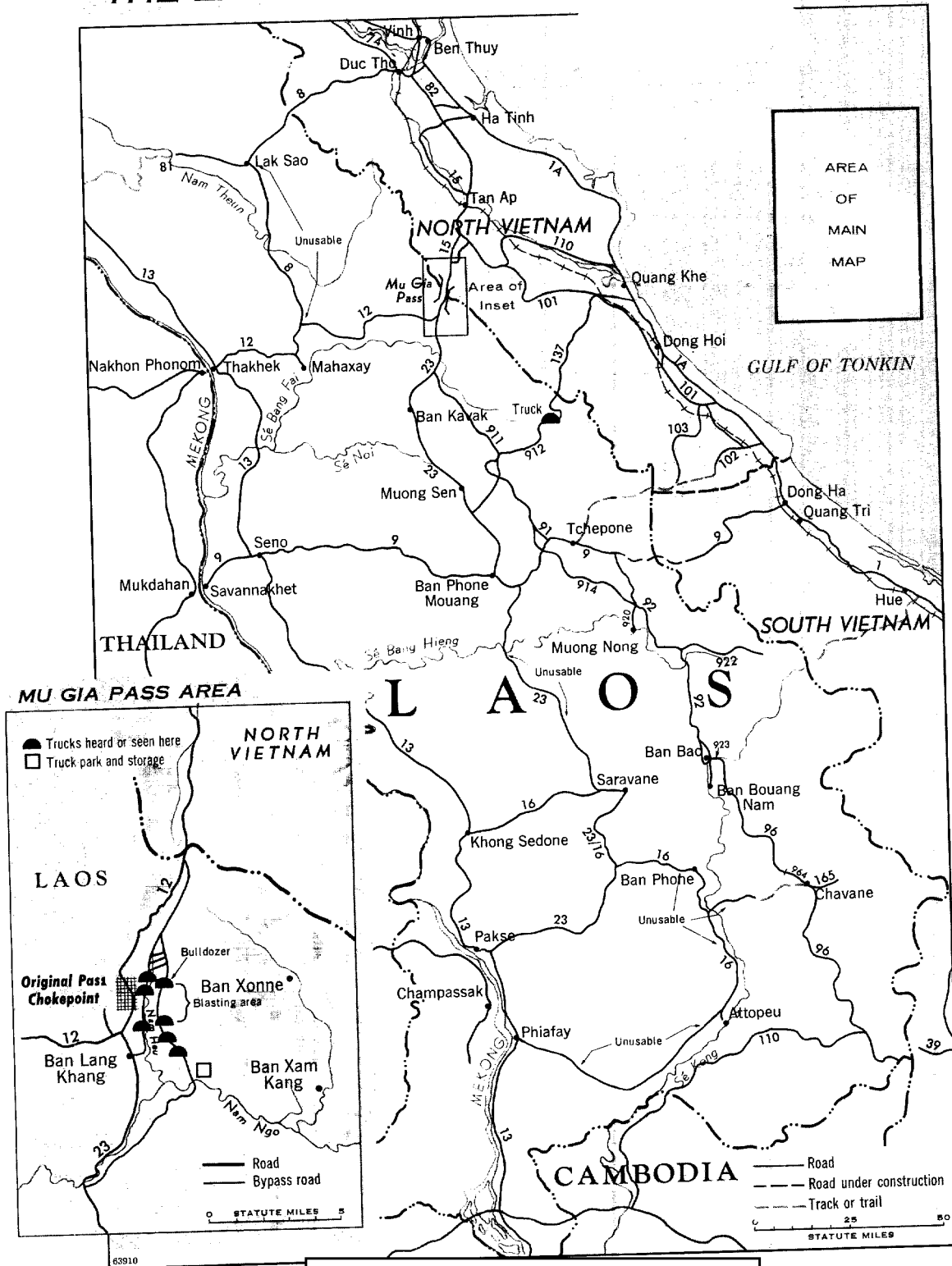
Moscow-Hanoi Economic Relations Showed Marked Improvement in 1965

4. The 1965 Soviet foreign trade handbook indicates that Soviet - North Vietnam trade increased last year to \$104 million from \$82 million in 1964. Soviet exports jumped almost two thirds (from 47 million in 1964 to 74 million in 1965) in an apparent reflection of the Soviet attempt to improve relations with Hanoi beginning in early 1965. At the same time Soviet imports from North Vietnam declined about \$4 million from 1964 totals. Soviet exports of machinery and equipment, the largest single export category, rose to \$48 million last year--almost double the 1964 value. Over two thirds of the machinery and equipment exports were categorized as being for factory complexes. Soviet announced exports of petroleum products increased from 101,300 tons in 1964 to 121,000 tons in 1965.

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THE LAOS PANHANDLE



VI. OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

1. A significant increase in truck movements from North Vietnam through Mu Gia Pass into Laos has been reported for the first time since the rainy season began last May. Between 7 and 20 September, road watch teams stationed at points near the Laotian end of the pass observed or heard about 80 trucks plus two convoys of unknown size heading South. During the same period, 15 trucks moved north toward the pass. Not counting the convoys, the traffic was double the light level estimated for May through August.

2. This increase in traffic has appeared approximately a month before the rainy season is due to end. It is believed that road maintenance in the pass area has taken place during the rainy season and is continuing. The watch teams heard sounds of blasting on four days, probably from a quarry where materials were being obtained to improve road surfaces. In addition, a bulldozer was reported in operation on 17 September.

3. It cannot yet be determined if North Vietnam - Laos traffic has also increased on Route 912, the other truck entry into the Laos panhandle from North Vietnam. Between 5 and 16 September, at least 20 trucks were counted using the route, but were seen in a location where local as well as North Vietnam - Laos traffic would pass.

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